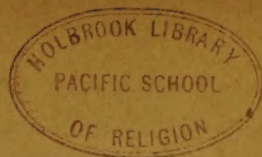


The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM



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DEAR MEMBER,

The following contribution to the discussion of the political task is from a life-long student of sociology and public affairs. Much wisdom is packed into small space.

THE CHRISTIAN POLITICAL MIND

"Professor Mannheim's warning of the danger of a tyrannical form of state supremacy, backed as it is by a widely informed and highly trained perception of what is happening to contemporary society, must be taken as authoritative, and the body of Christian political opinion, such as it is, ought to be kept awake to the duties thus laid upon it. For if there is one political conception which is axiomatic to the informed Christian mind, it is this—that the State can never be competent to define the aims of society or to control its organs of intelligence. The State cannot, of its own nature, create any social realities, but can only regulate them and defend them.

"The great danger of the present situation is not only, as Professor Mannheim emphasizes, that the technical structures of modern society invite and often almost compel the modern State to exceed its functions and encroach upon the freedom of its subjects. Its subjects, in reaction against the limitations which thus diminish their autonomy, tend usually to react in a manner likely to worsen their situation. The demands which are being framed by so many groups and movements, for large economic improvements, for the reform of international arrangements, for 'social justice,' universal education and even world-organization—all these demands for the reordering of affairs upon the largest scale, without explicit indication as to who should carry it out, are implicit invitations to the State to assume more and more comprehensive functions and to over-ride any local centres of initiative that may remain.

"It is difficult, and may sometimes be almost impracticable, for Christians to hold aloof from this, which is the fashionable form of political action in our days; yet they should never forget that the first line of defence against the menace of the 'omni-competent State' is not to join in demands for more things to be put in its power, nor to agitate for anything which is really outside the functions of a State but, in present circumstances, could only be undertaken by the State. This is a negative defence, but there is a positive side to it. The Christian mind in politics presses for things to be done or to be done differently, where it sees or knows who are the people who could, should or might do such things.

"This is perhaps the primary difference between the political mind of the Christian and that of the world. The Christian mind shows regard for detail, including this important detail of the human factor; in estimating any political action it looks first to the spiritual, mental and practical capacity of those who will have to carry it out, and to its probable practical, social and spiritual effects.

"By far the most important actions of each individual citizen, from a political as well as from other points of view, are those directed to the business and social affairs of his own locality, or of the occupational group (perhaps nation-wide or world-wide) to which he belongs. In these he can see at close quarters both what is done and the effects of what is done; and it is the improvement of this intimate sphere of fully responsible action which is the primary concern of the Christian as citizen.

"Whilst the politics of the world are unrealistic, even when well-intentioned, those of the Christian mind are fully realistic. To the Christian, the good that can come to man in society is always the creation of God working through the hearts and minds of individuals, enabling

them to make a full use of their natural environment, social endowment and cultural opportunities. The Christian cannot forget that there is a Power that over-rules all secular efforts, even those that are temporarily most successful, bringing some to frustration and others to good effect. But for this reason the Christian mind in its experience sets a greater value than the worldly mind upon the things that are actually given—the country (locality), the co-operating community, the striving individual—and the living organic relations between them.

“Certain principles emerge from this view of politics which it will be useful to bear in mind during the present world-revolutionary situation. For it may become necessary for the Christian mind to seek to inspire and inform, if not a political party, a body of political opinion working politically in the world and drawing into co-operation with it a perhaps larger body of opinion not specifically Christian.

“One of these principles is the responsibility of each community for the region or regions which it inhabits; for the cultivation and, if possible, the improvement of this its natural heritage. Worldly politics usually ignore this, and initiate forms of action and exploitation which cause deterioration in the local inheritance; in the belief that this does not matter, so long as the inhabitants are able by industrial, financial or military developments to make a good living out of the natural products of other countries, whose resources and amenities are equally disregarded.

“Another principle is that there should be a certain order in the vocations and occupations by which the community lives upon the products of its own region and exchanges some of them with those of other communities. The essence of this order is membership. To the Christian mind it can never be right for the mass of men to be dispossessed individuals, selling their labour at fluctuating market rates, their human ability being merely sold and bought like any other commodity. Men and women should be members equally of the cultural, social and economic institutions of their country, enabled to feel the rights and responsibilities of their recognized places, great or small, in these corporate activities of life, endowed with the training, and given the utmost freedom to make their contributions. But the compulsory membership of the State (citizenship) is not enough. Men need, for their spiritual and mental development as individuals, to become members of various kinds of self-appointed associations, and to be members, not only hirelings, of associations which serve their economic ends.

“Above all, men need liberty to form their own spiritual fraternities and cultural institutions; if only because the State will never be competent to centralize moral authority in itself or to undertake moral instruction. Freedom of religion is necessary primarily for this reason, that the relation of individuals to the deeper truths of life can only be discovered by them in freedom. But this principle extends far beyond the institutions of specifically religious worship and discipline. Human beings need the utmost autonomy in forming associations for every kind of cultural activity in science, hygiene and recreation, if the spiritual life of a community is to be sustained.

“The mere enunciation of these quiet, normal principles may seem to have little relevance to the stormy phase of world-revolution into which we have entered. But the vast forces and interests which are being precipitated into this political struggle, whose protagonists will compete with each other in promising us all a better world—these powers will not be striving that God’s will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. We need not be downcast if we find ourselves unable to co-operate to a great extent with any of them; it may be our duty to put forward into politics a spirit and a pressure which is more or less disliked by them all.

“Christians with a full sense of their political responsibility would do well to try to strengthen the influence of Christian principles in the coming struggle by initiating a movement of opinion in their favour. It might well begin from our own members, not with any formal organization or propaganda for that purpose, but by an extension of their present contacts, discussions and meetings in the direction indicated. In part at least, the principles of the Christian mind in politics are understood and approved by many who are not Christians, and a personal movement to act upon them in every way that may be opened in these critical years would not lack supporters.”

What is said in these paragraphs is necessary to complete the picture thus far presented in the News-Letter. This is what “Planning for *Freedom*” means. To get to work now in our own neighbourhood and to mobilize mental defences against the encroachment of tyranny is the surest protection against any major threat to our liberties which may confront us in the future. Personal responsibility and regional transformation are the

living cells of a healthy social organism. But these immediate tasks need to be carried out in full awareness of the larger decisions which concern the fate of society as a whole and which, if they are wrongly taken, may bar and bolt the door to further effort on the lines we desire. The formidable menace from the growth of a mass mentality, from powerful new techniques capable of misuse, and from the accentuation of domestic conflict to a point which would make the solution of our problems impossible, lends a note of urgency to all that we do.

The achievement of our aim imposes on us not one task, but two, and we must never lose sight of their inter-dependence. Like those who in ancient times built the walls of Jerusalem in the presence of the enemy, we have to lay brick upon brick with the utmost energy and at the same time be ready at any moment to grasp our weapons to ward off a danger that would deprive us of all opportunity of continuing to work for our chosen ends.

THE CHURCH AS THE CHAMPION OF LIBERTY

In the meantime, even where Nazi rule prevails, the fight for liberty goes on, and in the struggle the Church has won a position of leadership which it lacked in times when the challenge to its fundamental values was less open and acute. Miss Barbara Ward called attention last week to the Pastoral Letter read in all the Roman Catholic Churches in Germany, in which there was a powerful vindication from the Christian pulpit not only of the liberties of the Church but of ordinary human rights. In Norway it is the Christian Church which is the protagonist of freedom, and its courageous stand has attracted world-wide attention. The deposed bishops have formed a temporary Church Board which has issued a manifesto to all Norwegian clergymen and parishes. It is claimed in the manifesto that, while the Church has suffered an apparent defeat by the action of the authorities, it has in fact won a definite victory in maintaining a practically unbroken front. Instructions are given to all local Church councils to continue their work, regardless of whether they are deposed or not, and to remain in touch with their rightful bishops or deans. Clergymen are told to continue to work in their parishes even if they have laid down their office, or been deposed by the secular authorities. As has already been reported in the News-Letter, the overwhelming majority of teachers are behind the Church, which has become the central rallying point in the national struggle for freedom.

HUNGER IN EUROPE

News of the steadily worsening food situation in Belgium, Poland, occupied France and part of Norway is giving rise to wide-spread anxiety in this country among people of all shades of religious and political opinion. The Lord Provost of Glasgow and the Lord Mayor of Manchester are among those who have formed committees in more than forty provincial centres. A leading article in *The Times* last month suggested that the acute situation in Belgium made it "an urgent duty to consider whether there are any means by which, without aiding the German war effort, the United Nations can alleviate the needs of their ally."

This spontaneous growth of public opinion is welcome evidence that humanitarian sympathies have not been hardened by long acquaintance with the horrors of war. It may be hoped that these feelings will continue to grow in volume and strength until, as the result of persistent effort, some means is found by which the necessity of preventing reinforcement of the German military machine can be "integrated" with the necessity of bringing relief to our friends who are suffering in the common cause hardships that we have thus far escaped in this country.

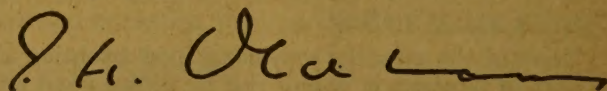
German propaganda posters in Brussels showing a starving woman and her child crouching beneath the towering figure of Mr. Churchill are frequently transformed by a few deft strokes overnight so that the towering figure becomes that of Hitler. Belgians know who are the real authors of their sufferings and understand the necessity of the blockade as a means of defeating Germany and so restoring their freedom.

At the same time it is part of the hideousness of war that Germany can be blockaded only through the occupied countries, so that from whatever shortage the Germans may suffer, our allies have to endure greater suffering. The Belgian people are now reduced to a fat ration of two and a half ounces a week and a meagre ration of bread which contains twenty per cent of barley and beetroot and very little wheat flour. The case for the small scheme of controlled relief for children and expectant mothers drawn up with the help of technical advice by the Famine Relief Committee, the appointment of which was announced in C.N.-L. No. 142, grows stronger as the need becomes greater. A deep concern exists in Sweden for Belgian children and, if the scheme which has been mentioned were permitted by our government, neutral observers would be ready to help in the control and distribution of supplies, and other forms of help would be forthcoming from that country, which has already shown its generosity in many directions.

"REAL LIFE IS MEETING"

The latest volume in the C.N.-L. Books Series is a reprint of some of the Supplements which have appeared during the last year in the Christian News-Letter, and is entitled *Real Life is Meeting*.¹ The volume includes an introductory chapter in which it is contended that in order to influence society in a Christian direction there must come into existence a body of people who in a fuller degree than at present consciously share a common faith, purpose and way of life; and that the bond of such a common faith and purpose is already present in an understanding of life which is breaking through in many diverse quarters and finds fragmentary expression in these Supplements. This understanding, however simple and obvious it may seem in any brief summary, involves a complete revolution in present thought and practice, and the change of outlet and attitude, if it were to become general, would mark off one epoch of history from another. Its core is the perception that the prevailing belief in the self-sufficiency of the individual, acting alone or in combination with others, to achieve his self-chosen ends is fundamentally false, and that in a return to the simple realities of human existence, in which man acknowledges his dependence on God, nature and his fellows, lies the germ and potency of a new and better age.

Yours sincerely,



¹ Sheldon Press, Northumberland Avenue, London, W.C. 2. 1s. 6d. The reprinted Supplements are those entitled "The Predicament of Society and the Way Out," "All Real Life is Meeting," "Superman or Son of God," "Christianity in an Age of Science," "The Gospel Drama and Society," "A Fresh Approach to Christian Education," and "Planning for Freedom."

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